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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 002391

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA, WHA/PPC, WHA/USOAS, AND WHA/CEN
NSC FOR DAN FISK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2015

TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM ECON KCRM PINR HO

SUBJECT: FIST STRONGER THAN AN OPEN HAND - 2 DAYS TO
HONDURAN ELECTIONS LOBO CONTINUES TO LEAD ZELAYA

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 2385 AND PREVIOUS

1B. TEGUCIGALPA 2355

1C. TEGUCIGALPA 2347

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James Williard;
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. Three days before the November 27 general elections and National Party Presidential candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo still holds a slight lead over Liberal Party presidential candidate Manuel "Mel" Zelaya - leading by nearly 3 percent in all major cities, according to most recent poll. On November 25, Ambassador sent both Lobo and Zelaya informal notes encouraging behavior that would promote free and fair elections. With the campaigns officially having ended November 21, the Embassy still formally judges the November 27 election as still too close to call, with the race not significantly changing since ref C's analysis of the race. Final campaign rallies, however, seem to add weight to the belief, however, that Lobo is primed to win. While Post continues to be concerned with post-election allegations of fraud, especially if Lobo does indeed win, violent demonstrations are not anticipated. End Summary.

Lobo Leads Zelaya in Polls - But Statistically A Dead Heat

2. (SBU) The most recent polls conducted nationally by Ingenieria Gerencial show National Party candidate and President of Congress Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo edging Liberal Party candidate Manuel "Mel" Zelaya as of late November 22. The 2.7 percent to 3 percent overall lead is barely above margin of error, however. In San Pedro Sula, Lobo leads by 2.62 percent, in Tegucigalpa by 6 percent, and in all other areas, by 1.48 percent. While other published polls show a much greater Lobo lead, Post has found the Ingenieria Gerencial polls to be the most reliable in Honduras.

3. (SBU) Other key National Party candidates also show large leads over their Liberal Party counterparts. National Party candidate for Tegucigalpa Mayor, Ricardo Alvarez, is beating his Liberal Party opponent, Enrique "Kike" Ortez, by 18 percent according to the November 22 Ingenieria Gerencial poll. The Nationalist Party candidate in San Pedro Sula, Arturo "Tuky" Bendana, now leads his Liberal Party opponent, Rafael Padilla Sunceri, by 14 percent in the same poll, in what was previously a tossup (ref B).

Closing Rallies Differences Parallel Candidates Differences

4. (C) With campaigning officially ending November 21 at midnight, both the National and Liberal parties held final rallies the evenings of November 21 in a last big push to win votes. Approximately 3,000 supporters were in attendance at the Liberal Party rally. The event was scheduled to begin at 4:00pm, although little else than the blasting of Zelaya's campaign jingle and the sale of "Mel" CDs, hats, and banners occurred until roughly 5:30pm. At that time, Zelaya, his VP candidate, Kike Ortez, and various other congressional candidates and aides crammed the very full stage. A microphone was passed to various congressional candidates in a series of underwhelming speeches. When Zelaya finally took the spotlight, his speech was equally fatigued. The issues he addressed were "citizen power" and a need for a change of administration. While the speech itself was neither new nor particularly inspiring, it was further denigrated as Zelaya passed the microphone on to others to speak after he did; lessening his and his speech's central importance. Zelaya's ads, meanwhile, have been pitching a life sentence vs. the death penalty, double the number of cops, and using a clip of Lobo's main primary candidate, Tegucigalpa Mayor Miguel Pastor, criticizing Lobo for his links to corruption. Zelaya has also named former General Alvaro Romero as his future Minister of Public Security and Rafael Pineda Ponce as his future Minister of Education to try to attract votes.

5. (C) Approximately 6,000 people filled the baseball stadium for the National Party final rally. The event began only somewhat late and was clearly choreographed to end with an energizing speech by its presidential candidate, Pepe Lobo,

and comments from the charismatic former Minister of Public Security Oscar Alvarez. (Lobo was preceded by Ricardo Alvarez and Lobo's wife.) In addition to being significantly larger than the Liberal Party's rally - buses filled the roads leading to the stadium revealing the National Party's reach - the rally was also better organized and better funded. Fireworks emphasized points and there was a second stage that jettisoned into the crowd so that speakers were separated from the masses of other congressional candidates and aides on the main stage. The National Party image of the closed, raised fist easily created energy and enthusiasm; in sharp contrast the Liberal Party's open-hand. Lobo spoke about various themes (expropriation of property for land reform, job creation, etc.), but it was his points about the anti-gang law that seemed to generate the largest reactions. The Lobo campaign ads hit hard against Zelaya for his alleged support for the Mara Salvatrucha gang in a complaint before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the Liberal judges on the Supreme Court for not yet signing the decree upholding the constitutionality of the anti-gang law.

Too Close to Call

16. (C) Comment: The presidential race is still too close to call. While Lobo and the National Party appear to have the advantage in both the polls and organizationally, the "hidden vote" continues to make the race a toss-up. Therefore, turnout is key, and the election observation efforts, both OAS and domestic, are even more crucial to ensure a transparent election process and stymie anticipated cries of election fraud once the results have been released. While the supporters of both parties seemed to be similar - all ages represented, all from a similar socio-economic background - the look, feel, and organization of the final campaign rallies could be an indicator of the possible end result. End Comment.
Ford